

AN

EFFECTUAL METHOD

FOR RECOVERING OUR

RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES,

ADDRESSED TO THE

Elders of the Church of Scotland,

K. Scotland, Clerk

SHEWING,

That they may easily bring about a total Change of Administration in this Church, and thereby remove the principal Grievances arising from the Law of Patronage; with particular Directions for attaining this desirable End.

Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double Honour.

1 TIM. V. 17.

GLASGOW:

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M. E. T. D.

FOR THE

RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES

ADDRESS TO THE



LIBRARY

THE

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TO THE
E L D E R S
OF THE
PRESBYTERIES
OF
DUMBARTON AND PAISLEY,
WHO HAVE SIGNALIZED THEMSELVES
IN THE CAUSE OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY;
THE FOLLOWING
A T T E M P T,
TO STIR UP THEIR BRETHREN
TO THE SAME
GENEROUS AND PUBLIC SPIRITED CONDUCT,
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY
INSCRIBED
BY
THE A U T H O R.

TO THE
 L L D E R S
 OF THE
 PRESBYTERIES
 OF
 DUMBARTON AND PAISLEY
 WHO HAVE SIGNIFIED THEIR WIVES



THE FOLLOWING
 A T T E M P T
 TO STIR UP THEIR BROTHERS
 TO THE CAUSE
 GENEROUS AND PUBLIC SPIRITED CONDUCT
 IS MOST RESPECTFULLY
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E F F E C T U A L

M E T H O D

FOR RECOVERING OUR

RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES.

MANY laudable attempts have been made of late, by the friends of liberty, to rescue us from the wretched thralldom of patronage, under which we have long been groaning. Some have bravely stood up in our ecclesiastical courts against the arbitrary measures of a prevailing faction, and contended for those sacred privileges which they have from time to time been wresting from us: others, again, have employed their pens in explaining our excellent constitution, and have shown, with the most irresistible evidence, that, notwithstanding the law of patronage, there is still so much power reserved to the church, as, if vigorously exercised, would, in a great measure, prevent its unhappy effects. But what does all this avail, so long as the majority lyes on the wrong side? What does it signify, how much power we have, if we have neither the heart nor the inclination to use it? And to what purpose is it for a smaller number to struggle against the force of a greater, in a court, where, without any regard either to law or equity, every thing must be determined by a plurality of votes? This, indeed, may

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keep up some faint remembrance of our ancient independency, without which it might be in danger of being altogether forgotten; but, it is plain, that it can have no effect, either in recovering what we have lost, or preserving any thing which yet remains: and, no doubt, our adversaries must foresee, that if matters continue in this way a while longer, we will at last drop the contest, and leave them to carry on their scheme without any opposition.

There is therefore an absolute necessity, that some other measures should yet be taken, in order, if possible, to save us from that ruin which seems fast to be coming upon us. But to what quarter ought we to look in this pressing extremity? Who are to be the restorers of our Christian liberty, and the supporters of our tottering constitution? I think it must appear evident, by this time, to every reflecting person, that the few worthy ministers that are among us, can bring us no relief, unless they be supported by some additional strength; for, upon a very moderate computation, there are at least two thirds of the ministers of this church, who, from one motive or another, are the declared friends of patronage, and consequently unite in promoting every scheme which is laid to enslave us. It is in vain to reason with these persons concerning the part which they are acting; for experience shows us, that they are determined to hold on in opposition to every thing that can be said. Were they to be influenced by a regard to that constitution which they solemnly engaged to support, is it possible they can be ignorant, that, by the conduct which they pursue, they are undermining its very foundation? Were they acted by a concern for the interests of religion, and the salvation of precious and immortal souls, how can these ever be promoted, by thrusting in ministers upon a people that will not receive them? And had they any regard to the natural sentiments of humanity itself, how could they ever

allow themselves, cruelly to rob their Christian brethren, of one of their dearest and most valuable privileges, the right of chusing a minister to take the care of their souls?

Now, what good can be expected from a set of men who are got so great a length, that all these affecting considerations can make little or no impression upon them? Some of them, indeed, have pleaded in their behalf, that their conduct, in these cases, does not proceed so much from choice as from necessity; because, since the law of the land must have its effect, they reckon it the least of two evils, quietly to comply with its demands. But it hath been shown, in several treatises lately written upon this subject, that the church is under no necessity, by law, to carry on any violent settlements; and therefore, that the spiritual oppression and tyranny, which we have had so much reason to complain of, ought entirely to be ascribed unto churchmen themselves. This is a point which hath been established with so much strength of evidence, that all the friends of patronage have not been able to disprove it. But has this produced the desired alteration in their conduct? So far from it, that they are, if possible, more zealous in their opposition than ever. And, now, when their cause seems destitute of every shadow of argument, they have, at last, been endeavouring to maintain it by the most shameful dissingenuity and fraud. One of their writers, in particular, has just now been detected, producing a passage in favour of patronage, in the name of a celebrated author, that he might thereby get the sanction of his authority unto it, in whom no such passage is to be found*. Can there be any thing more base and scandalous than such an action? It is an open insult and indignity done to the

* The reader may see this, if he chuse, in the *Candid Inquiry*, &c. among the tracts concerning patronage, p. 59. supposed to be written by the Rev. Mr Randall of Stirling.

publick, to endeavour thus to deceive them by a downright forgery, as well as an injury to the person in whose name it is laid. It can admit of no apology, either from ignorance or mistake: and those who can adhere to a scheme which must be supported by such detestable artifices, are surely not to be influenced by any considerations either of duty or of honour.

From all these circumstances, taken together, I confess, I have beheld, with a secret indignation, the pains which some very worthy men have thrown away in persuading the ministers of the church who are upon the side of patronage, while another valuable part of our constitution, from which we might look for much greater service, hath been quite neglected. Perhaps some of my readers will be surpris'd to find, that the persons here intended are the elders. But I am able to show, that these very persons, however much some may affect to despise them, along with the few ministers among us that will join them, may easily bring about a total revolution in the management of our ecclesiastical affairs. I therefore make no scruple of addressing myself to you, my brethren in the eldership, for this purpose; and I do it with the greater chearfulness, and even big with the hopes of success in this application, because I am persuaded that you are both willing and able to help us. Allow me, therefore, to point out to you the weight which you bear in the government of this national church, with which I suppose many of you are but little acquainted; for it is a part of the policy which hath been used by designing men, to keep you as much as possible in the dark about every thing of this kind.

That elders are an essential part of our ecclesiastical constitution, is a fact which cannot be doubted by any person who hath the smallest acquaintance with its history. Our venerable reformers, whose memory will be ever precious to all the true friends either of religion, liberty, or learning, when they searched the

scriptures, to know how the church of Christ should be governed, found that it was by the united jurisdiction of ministers and lay-elders; and that, so far as they could discover, it seemed to lye equally between them. They, therefore, immediately set about ordaining fit persons to this important office in the several parishes, who might take part along with the ministers in the management of spiritual affairs; and we find that these persons were to be constituent members of every ecclesiastical court or assembly within this realm. This you may see plainly laid down in the Second Book of Discipline, which was the original legally established form of government in this church after the Reformation. It is true, indeed, it was not then digested into that exact and regular order in which it stands at present. This could not be done without considerable time and attention; and, therefore, no more can be expected here than a general sketch of those principles upon which our ecclesiastical polity was afterwards formed.

At that time, so far as I can learn, presbyteries and parish-sessions, except in large towns, seem, in a great measure, to be confounded together; and the first general assembly that was held after the Reformation, was so far from consisting of commissioners from presbyteries, as it does now, that all the reformed ministers and their elders resorted to it; and it is particularly recorded, that the number of ministers was then so small, that they did not exceed a fourth part of the meeting. Here then, although it was only accidental, the elders bore so great a sway, that they made no less than three fourths of that assembly. Afterwards, when the number of ministers had considerably encreased, and presbyteries were regularly formed, they began to think of representing themselves by commissioners in their assemblies; and now it is, that we learn, with certainty, what influence and weight the church considered elders to bear.

In the Directory for Church-Government, printed in the year 1647, it is provided, that the assembly shall consist of an equal number of ministers and elders. This proportion seems to have been taken from the practice of the reformed church of France, and it balances the power exactly between the clergy and the laity. It was upon this principle, that the representation of presbyteries was adjusted by the assembly in the year 1694, which, together with the representation of boroughs and universities, was supposed to preserve an equality of ministers and elders in our supreme court, although time has shown that it has produced a considerable majority of the former. The proportion which was then fixed between ministers and elders is as follows, and it hath been strictly observed ever since.—That all presbyteries, containing not more than twelve ministerial charges, shall send to the assembly two ministers and one elder.—That all presbyteries, containing above twelve, but not more than eighteen charges, shall send three ministers and one elder.—That all presbyteries, containing above eighteen, but not more than twenty-four charges, shall send four ministers and two elders.—And, lastly, that all presbyteries, containing above twenty-four charges, shall send five ministers and two elders. This is all the length that the proportion was carried by the assembly 1694. But it was afterwards provided, upon the same principle, by the assembly 1712, that every presbytery, whose number exceeds thirty ministerial charges, shall send six ministers and three elders*.

Now although, as the case stands at present, the

* The reader will take care to observe, that the proportion is fixed by the number of charges in a presbytery, and not by the number of parishes or ministers themselves; so that it cannot be diminished, either by there being no minister in a parish, as in the case of a vacancy, or by two or more ministers having only one parish, as in collegiate charges.

number of elders must be considerably smaller in our assemblies than that of ministers, yet, with the help which you may always expect from them, it is evident that you have every thing in your own power. This you will be sensible of yourselves by the following calculation.—There are just sixty-seven presbyteries in this church, of which thirty send to the assembly two ministers and one elder,—twenty-eight send three ministers and one elder,—seven send four ministers and two elders,—one sends five ministers and two elders,—and one six ministers and three elders. This makes, in whole, one hundred and eighty-three ministers, and seventy-seven elders.—But there are sixty-six royal boroughs in Scotland, each of which has the privilege of sending one elder to the assembly, and the town of Edinburgh two, which makes sixty-seven elders more.—And then each of the five universities has the privilege of sending one elder;—so that our assembly, when it is fully met, consists of one hundred and eighty-three ministers, and one hundred and forty-nine elders. It is true, indeed, that the Scots church at Campvere in Holland has the right of being represented in our assembly; but, as this makes no alteration in the case, it is almost unnecessary to mention it. Here, then, you will observe, that the difference between ministers and elders in our assembly is only thirty-four; so that you want but eighteen of the ministers to give you a clear majority; and when was there ever an assembly where you would not have got many more of them upon your side? Thus it plainly appears, that if you were united among yourselves, and thought it worth your while to attend that court, you might easily over-rule every arbitrary measure in our ecclesiastical affairs.

But this is taking too narrow a view of the influence which you possess; for you have not only great weight in the assembly, by the proportion which you hold in it,

but, what is of far greater importance, you have the very forming and modifying of that court entirely in your power. Every body knows, that there is an equal number of ministers and elders in each presbytery, of which the latter are elected by the several sessions which they represent. Now, if sessions were but at due pains to send up right elders to their presbyteries at the annual election of commissioners, who would unite upon men that would be faithful to the trust reposed in them, it is most evident, that our assemblies should immediately be of quite a different complexion, even though there were but few elders at the trouble of attending them: and is there any thing more easy to be accomplished than this? How simple, and how effectual, is the remedy? How small is the trouble or expence which it requires? And yet to the mere neglect of applying it, may be ultimately referred the greatest part of the hardships we are now suffering; for, if you had rightly understood and exercised the power with which you are invested, it is absolutely impossible that the church could ever have connived with the state, in its design to oppress us, and all the schemes it hath contrived for this purpose would have been rendered abortive. Are you not astonished to think, that, when you have been complaining so loudly of the ruinous decisions of our late assemblies, you should all the while have continued idle and unactive, when you were able at once to put a stop to them? Must it not grieve the heart of every serious person to reflect upon such fatal negligence? Perhaps there never was an instance in which the most valuable rights that a people can be possessed of were lost so filially, as in the case before us; but, it is comforting to add, that, perhaps, there never was an instance in which they could be more easily regained.

I am sensible, indeed, that all that hath been said, proceeds upon the supposition, that the elders of this

church are, in general, firmly attached to our most excellent constitution. But is not this undoubtedly the fact? nothing can be more certain, than that almost your whole body wish well to the cause which I am now pleading, however much they may be rendered useless to it by particular influence. Nay, such is the universal character of the people themselves, that it is scarce possible for ministers to get persons put into that office who are of a different disposition. But, though the case were otherwise, it would require but a small degree of caution to keep them out; for, as every session has the entire and exclusive right of chusing its own members, it would surely be a very remarkable piece of stupidity in the present members, if they could not pitch upon persons of the same sentiments with themselves. Have we not many instances of civil societies, where, though the parties are nearly balanced, and some of the members are changed every year, yet, when either of them prevails over the other, it will commonly maintain and strengthen its influence for a long course of time; and how much easier must it be, to preserve a lasting superiority, where there is little opposition to struggle with at all? Indeed, it is a peculiar excellency in our constitution, that this radical part of it is of such a nature, that, if proper care be taken, it can hardly be corrupted, so long as there is any regard to religion among us. And though, at present, there may be some false brethren, who have crept in unawares, and who are lying in wait to betray us, yet, as these are inconsiderable, when compared with the rest, you may in a manner annihilate their influence while they are with you; and time itself will soon rid you of them, if you be only more cautious, for the future, how you fill up your numbers.

The part, then, which you have to act, is extremely plain and easy; and it is a duty to which you are loudly

called, at present, in the course of divine providence.—
 First of all, you should take great care what sort of persons
 you bring in among you; for, observe, that no minister
 whatever has any thing to say in the election of elders,
 except when the matter comes to his casting vote; so
 that, if improper persons are brought into that office,
 you, and you alone, are to blame for it. This is a pri-
 vilege, which, as it is your unquestionable right, so it
 is of the very utmost consequence, that it be wisely ex-
 exercised; for, indeed, the whole safety of the church de-
 pends upon it. It is like keeping the fountain pure,
 without which the streams must necessarily be corrupt;
 or, to make use of another figure, it is like laying the
 foundation firm, upon which the superstructure is after-
 wards to be raised. You should therefore, above all
 things, be careful that none be admitted into your socie-
 ty, but those who are not only of unblemished charac-
 ter, but likewise understand and value the privileges of
 the church, and will be active and zealous to the utmost
 of their power to defend them. For this purpose, you
 should especially beware of admitting persons of quali-
 ty, or high rank, unless you have the strongest evidence
 of their attachment to your interest, because these per-
 sons being either patrons themselves, or nearly con-
 nected with them, as well as on other accounts that
 might be mentioned, you will rarely find them disposed
 to go along with you in these matters. For the same
 reason, you would do well to keep a jealous eye over all
 lawyers, and be very cautious of admitting them; for,
 though there are some persons both among them and
 the former, who, following the example of their il-
 lustrious ancestors, have shown a deep concern for the
 good of this church, and should therefore be counted
 worthy of the highest honour, yet they are, in general, its
 inveterate and most dangerous foes. It is owing solely
 to your inattention, that so many of these persons have
 got in among you already, to the reproach and disgrace

of your office*, as well as an unspeakable injury to the church; and, if you still sleep on in the same careless state, you will bring upon this poor church the very worst evil that can befall it, I mean, a corrupt eldership, along with a corrupt ministry, in consequence of which our ruin must be unavoidable; for it is a case which can admit of no remedy at all.

You see, then, it is a matter of the very utmost con-

* It is a very hard case, which often happens, when people must not only suffer wrong, but dare not even complain of the injury which is done them, and when they are obliged to see the most sacred things profaned and abused, and yet dare not venture to affirm that this is really the fact. But I do not think we need be much afraid to declare our sentiments in the case before us. Perhaps, indeed, it would not be safe to say all that might be truly said concerning the characters of many of these elders; but, surely, there can be no hazard in affirming, that not a few of them have been admitted directly contrary to the constitutional laws of this church. Many are the statutes which have been enacted, to prevent all but men of untainted virtue, and exemplary piety, from getting into the eldership; and these have been reckoned of such indispensable obligation, that the forms which they prescribe cannot be omitted to this day, though the very purpose and meaning of them is most notoriously transgressed. For instance, all presbyteries are obliged, solemnly, to attest the character of every elder whom they send up to the assembly, in the following manner, "That he is faithful in discharging the duties of his office; that he is tender and circumspect in his walk, punctual in his attendance upon ordinances, strict in his observation of the Lord's day, and regular in keeping up the worship of God in his family." But is there any regard paid to the truth of this attestation with respect to our learned and honourable elders? This, indeed, in most cases, is not so much as pretended, else what is the meaning of that despicable evasion, which, however, many times cannot even be applied, namely, that they know of nothing to the contrary? And with respect to family worship, in particular, as if the most solemn actions were only proper to be made a jest of, they insist, that the attestation is literally true, if they say grace at meals; so that if a person were but to pronounce these two words, LORD BLESS, which is all that many people do upon such occasions, there are not wanting ministers who would make no scruple to attest, that he keeps up the worship of God in his family. However, there is no occasion now for any artifices

sequence, that all possible caution be exercised in admitting new members into your society; and that it is an error of the most dangerous and destructive tendency to the interests of religion in this country, to receive any person into that office, whatever be his character in other respects, if he is not a cordial friend to the constitution of our church.

But there is another error that must be mentioned, much a-kin to this, and productive at last of the very

of this kind; for, after they had often broke through this noble barrier against impiety in the eldership, it was at last totally demolished, and taken out of the way, that so a door might be fully opened for admitting the most worthless men.

I cannot forbear inserting, in this place, the following description, which was drawn some time ago by an anonymous writer, because it appears to me to contain a very graphical picture by no means foreign to the present subject: "Suppose, says he, the time should come, when there should be persons in the character of elders, so far from being strict in maintaining the worship of God in their families, that it is not so much as proposed even when a minister is their guest, unless very rarely, perhaps out of compliment to some of the graver sort. Suppose them as often spending the Lord's day in visiting, or at cards. as in the publick and private exercises of devotion; so far from being faithful in discharging the duties of their office, that it would be difficult to name a session of which they could be reckoned members; so far from performing the usual duty of serving communicants at the Lord's table, that they seldom, if ever, partake of that sacrament themselves. Suppose them never so much as looking into a church court, except an assembly or commission. and there only when there is a job to do; perhaps pouring in like an inundation, at one diet, in order to carry a settlement that can serve no religious purpose, but must obviously tend to scatter the flock of Christ, and involve the church in distress and confusion while, at the very next diet, it is with the utmost difficulty that as many of them can be gathered out of taverns and concerts, as are sufficient to make a quorum for taking any measure to discourage profanity. How dismal must be the consequences, if persons of such characters should have a title to decide in our ecclesiastical affairs?" And although this author prudently refers the description to some future period, yet if we were to consider it as intended to signify, that this was actually the case already, I believe we would not very much mistake his meaning.

same effects; and that is, when any great difference falls in between elders and their minister, then nothing will serve them, frequently, but they must lay down their charge. Hereby they think they will vex and punish their minister, by leaving him to himself; or, perhaps, they have such a sense of the indignity of his conduct, that their consciences will not allow them to sit as members of a court where he has the privilege to preside.—It is pity that any man's conscience should lead him to act in this manner. It is surely for want of being rightly informed, if it does. Nothing can be a greater mistake, than to think that this will be a punishment or vexation to the minister; for, in many cases, it is highly agreeable to him, and the very thing he most earnestly desires. But it ought seriously to be considered what are the consequences with which this is followed. It is evident, at first view, that hereby the church loses, from time to time, a number of her best and truest friends; and if they are succeeded at all in their office, it is either by those who will go along with their minister, in betraying her interests, or, at best, be lukewarm and indifferent about them. This, therefore, is one of the worst contrived measures that any person can possibly take. It defeats the very end it was intended to serve; indeed, there is no end it can serve, but to hasten our destruction. And, permit me to tell you, that it is contrary to the fundamental principles and rules of our constitution itself; for, there it is provided, "That when persons are once lawfully called to the office of elders, they may not leave it again, while their gifts and abilities for discharging it remain*." Hoping, then, that this may be a seasonable caveat, to prevent you from laying down your charges in this way, for the future, I now proceed to give you the remaining directions upon the subject.

* See the Second Book of Discipline, Chap. 6.

Next to the preserving and continuing a right eldership, in general, you should be at great pains to get proper elders duly elected as your representatives in presbyteries and synods. These two points, indeed, comprise the whole of your duty with respect to the government of this church. The former is of vast importance, as it serves to maintain and secure your influence; although, it is plain, it can be of no real use, unless it be accompanied with the latter, by which this latent power is brought forth to action. This, therefore, may be considered, as the first step you have to take of a public nature in church-government; and, indeed, it is all that you can do as a general body; for, by this deed, you divest yourselves of the power which you possess, and transfer it to these delegates who may afterwards use it as they think proper.

Nothing can show more strongly, of what moment it is, that you look well to your privilege in this respect. Nay, although you had no other evidence at all, the very sentiments which certain ministers discover concerning it, might be sufficient, to convince you, that it is a matter of the last importance. What anxious jealousy, and even fear, do they betray, when they see the elders assuming the prerogative which belongs unto them! How many artifices do they employ, to dissuade them from it! And when all that they can say proves ineffectual, they have sometimes obstinately refused to call a session, that they might prevent them from executing so threatening a design. But it would be a mark of the poorest spirit imaginable, if you suffered yourselves to be bullied out of your right by any such means; for this is a privilege which is secured to you, in the most inviolable manner by the law of the land; and, therefore, it is impossible for any person to deprive you of it. It is an essential principle of our constitution, as established by law, that there can be no church-courts of any kind without elders,

and that these persons have a right to judge and determine in every cause that cometh before them. But if ministers could hinder sessions from chusing their representatives, by refusing to meet with them for that purpose, it is manifest, it would be in their power to engross the whole ecclesiastical government into their own hands, and thereby to deprive the elders of that share in the administration which the law itself hath ascertained to them, in consequence of which, the greatest tyranny and despotism might ensue. There must, therefore, be some remedy against such a daring usurpation, otherwise the established order of this church might be quite subverted, and the people could have no security for any of their religious privileges whatever. The method, then, which you must take, in such cases, is shortly this: A majority of your number, but not without informing the rest, and desiring them to attend, must call a publick notary, and go into the presence of your minister, and require him to hold a session without delay, which, if he refuse to do, you must take a protest against him, in the hands of the notary, and then immediately elect your representative; which election being made, and attested in this publick manner, will be as valid and unexceptionable as if it had been made in the usual way. Perhaps, you may think, that this is rather treating your minister without due respect. But, certainly, any person who acts in this manner can have no title to your delicacy; nay, you ought further to make a complaint against him to the presbytery, and insist that they should take proper measures for preventing any inconvenience of this kind in time to come.

But the great loss is, that the generality of elders do not rightly understand the importance of this privilege. They look upon it as a thing that can have little or no effect; and, therefore, they will not be at the trouble to contend for it. If this were not the fact, how could

it ever have happened, that, in many sessions, there has not been a representative chosen within the memory of man? Nay, what is still worse, that in others the minister has the address to get a person chosen, (if such an one there be among them) who will assist him in supporting every pernicious scheme; and, when persons of a different character are chosen, how hard is it to get them brought up either to presbyteries or synods, even when affairs of the greatest moment are to be determined? This fatal negligence and inattention is the great ground of complaint which we have against you; and, indeed, it is not easy to conceive how you should continue in such a listless and torpid state, when your most valuable privileges are so audaciously invaded. A plain and certain method, for recovering them, hath now been laid before you; and, I would to God, you might only be persuaded, in good earnest, to make the trial; for there cannot be the smallest doubt of its producing the desired effect. You have seen, that nothing can hinder you from electing your representatives at the usual terms; and, therefore, it is most inexcusable, at any time, to neglect it; but, as matters stand at present, it demands more than ordinary vigilance and circumspection. The one invariable rule which you have to observe, is, to chuse always the most intelligent, faithful, and active men that are among you, and those who will give punctual and regular attendance both at presbyteries and synods. What does it signify, though you should be obliged repeatedly to chuse the same persons? Do we not see many of our learned and honourable elders taking their seats every year as members of our assembly, although it is pity that the most of them should ever be there at all? This, however, I do not find any fault with, because it is their unquestionable right, if they are regularly chosen and attested. All that is desired, is, that you would only take the same legal measures, and exercise something of the same zeal and diligence in

supporting the constitution of the church, which is at present in so languishing a state, as you see others doing to bury it for ever in its own ruins; and thus I have done with the directions which I intended to give you as a general body.

But, after all the length that we have come, the principal part of the plan remains still to be executed. This is the province and duty of representatives only. Suffer me, therefore, to deliver a few instructions concerning it, to those of you who are intrusted with that important office. And here, brethren, you must have already observed, that the main point you have to manage, is, the election of commissioners to the general assembly. This, indeed, is the very hinge, so to speak, upon which the whole project turns; and, if you fail in the management of it, all your other attempts must be utterly unsuccessful. You ought, therefore, by all possible means, to attend your respective presbyteries upon the day of election. Not a single person should be absent from such an interesting and decisive affair; for, when parties are nearly equal, the want of a single vote will sometimes turn the scale; and, if any of you are necessarily hindered from attending, you ought, in that case, instantly to resign your commission, that the sessions to which you belong may proceed to elect others in your room. But a regular and careful attendance is not sufficient to do the business, unless you make the best of your votes when you are present. For this purpose, it would be highly expedient to meet together beforehand by yourselves, along with those ministers in the presbytery that are your real friends, in order to advise with them concerning the most proper persons to be chosen, that so you and they may act in concert with one another. The propriety, and even the necessity, of this, must appear, at once, to every person who spends but a single thought upon the subject. Indeed, this measure, or one equivalent to it, is always reckoned so indispen-

sibly necessary, that, I believe, there is scarcely an instance in the world of its being omitted upon such occasions by any society, either civil or ecclesiastical, except yourselves; in consequence of which, there is, perhaps, no society to be found who act with so little judgment in their elections as you do. It is a most grievous thing to be witness to a set of men, who have come up with a sincere desire to get faithful members elected for our supreme court, throwing away some of their votes upon persons that were not intended to be chosen by either party, and thereby the election carried quite against them; and yet this is a blunder into which you have often fallen, merely for want of taking this previous step. There is likewise another great error, which you sometimes commit, in reckoning yourselves bound to vote for your own minister, though he be set up by the opposite party, when he and you happen to live in friendship with one another. This is a circumstance well known to them, and which they carefully keep in view, although you seem little to observe it; for, whenever they find themselves in a strait, they always pitch upon such persons, knowing that they may then depend upon a concurrence from your side. It is wonderful to think, that you should not perceive the glaring absurdity of this part of your conduct. Can there be any thing more inconsistent with your views, than to give your vote for any person, let his private behaviour be ever so good, if he follow those measures in the church, which will ruin the interests of religion among us? And do you not yet understand, that this is the practice of every one who joins with that party?

But, of all the enemies you have to deal with, none are so dangerous, as those subtle, crafty men, who disguise themselves before the people, in order to deceive them. These persons make it their great study, to appear reasonable and moderate in all their proceedings; they have always some fair pretence at hand wherewith to

varnish over every part of their conduct; and what is a main piece of their policy, they appear, in general, to be doing nothing at all, pretending that they dislike all party-work, and that they see so little good arising from it, that they have resolved to have nothing to do with it, while, at the same time, they are at the bottom of every scheme that is set on foot. Often have I known elders blinded by these persons to the most lamentable degree. But there is one plain and simple rule, by which you may discover, with certainty, what disposition they are of. Observe with what sort of ministers they chiefly associate, and whom they chuse for their most favourite and intimate friends; and if you find, as I believe you will always find, that these are the enemies of our constitution, you may safely conclude, that they are of the same character. Again, observe further, what side they take themselves when they come to act; for, however cautious they may be, they must sometimes openly take a side, only you must beware of being deceived by any speeches they may make; for I have heard of a man, who used to speak always upon the side of the people, and yet voted always against them. This, therefore, is the decisive point which you ought carefully to observe; and, if you find them either voting against your interest, or leaving the court, when they know the cause will be carried without them, this ought, in all reason, to confirm you in your opinion of them, and put it beyond any further doubt. Nay, the very air of indifference which they assume, may justly raise a suspicion against them; for, I lay it down as a principle, that no minister can be a real friend to the interests of this church, at present, who is not both active and zealous to promote them. At any rate, it is evident, that a man of this character is altogether unfit for your purpose; and that you ought not to put such an important office into his hands,

since, to say the least, he will make no conscience of discharging the duties belonging to it.

From all that hath been said, it appears to be your indispensable duty, to fix only upon ministers who are undoubtedly well affected to the interests of the church; and, bad as we are, I believe there are but few presbyteries where such ministers are not to be found. And, as for elders, you should chuse them almost wholly from amongst yourselves; for there are very few of our learned and honourable elders that should ever be members of our assembly, unless they be of a very different character from what they are at present.

I am well aware, that, in this whole affair, you will have many difficulties thrown in your way. It is but natural to suppose, that all possible means should be used to hinder you from taking a step which must produce such a total change of administration, as this will evidently do; and, accordingly, as if they were apprehensive of something of this kind already, and, knowing that they cannot hinder it by force, because you have both law and numbers to support it, they have employed their utmost address, to get the practice of electing commissioners laid aside, and some other mode of appointing them substituted in its room. One very plausible scheme has been much insisted upon for this purpose; that of sending up members to the assembly by rotation. By this means it is said no minister would be deprived of a privilege that so justly belongs to him by the influence of any party, but every member of this church would get a fair and open hearing; and there would be no such thing as packed assemblies, or assemblies that are elected with no other view than to serve the designs of some particular men. It must be confessed, that all this carries a great appearance of impartiality along with it; but the fallacy lyes in keeping out of view this undeniable fact, that the church is rent, at present, into two great and opposite parties; the one

the friends, and the other the enemies of the constitution; and that it was the very design for which elections of this kind were appointed, to prevent these last from having any share in the administration at all. This shows us, that these persons are so far from having a right to be appointed members of assembly, that the constitution itself meant certainly to exclude them; and yet the scheme we are now speaking of, is manifestly fitted to preserve the supreme authority for ever in their hands: from whence it follows, that if you were once to give up the right of electing your commissioners, there is nothing worth contending for that would be left behind.

I will not stay, to mention any more instances of the stratagems which they employ, in order to discourage the elders from insisting upon their rights: such as, how strongly they represent the indecency of their voting contrary to their own ministers, as if their ministers were infallible guides for them implicitly to follow. How industrious they are to blacken the character of them that oppose them, by representing them as seditious men, and stirrers up of strife. And, on the other hand, what unbounded praises they bestow on those who make no resistance to any of their measures, as men of the most amiable and peaceable dispositions. These, and many other things, you must lay your account to meet with, if you make conscience of discharging your duty, as it has now been laid before you: but I hope none of them will be able to move you from it. And, for your direction at other meetings of presbytery, and likewise at the synod (all which you must faithfully attend,) I have nothing further to add; but only again to remind you, to advise with those ministers who have given undoubted proofs of their attachment to your interest, and then you will be in little danger of going wrong.

Thus, brethren, I have shown you, at full length,

the weight which you bear in the government of this church, and that it is entirely in your power to give a different turn to the administration whenever you please. I have likewise pointed out the several steps by which this important change may be brought about. And may I not now appeal to the judgment of every reader, who has any tolerable knowledge of the state of our church and country, whether the scheme I have proposed is not both practicable in its nature, and certain in its effect? It is, indeed, amazing to think, that a scheme, which hath such an obvious tendency to recover our liberties, seems scarcely to have occurred to former writers upon the subject*: and, I do readily confess, that this is a circumstance at which I would have stumbled not a little, as thinking that I must certainly be in some mistake, were it not, that every part of it is capable of the clearest demonstration.

But there is one mighty objection to which the whole is liable, and I expect it will be urged here with the greatest force. What is the valuable end, it may be asked, which this proposal is fitted to serve? or what real advantage can result from it? Perhaps, indeed, it may produce decisions of a certain kind in our ecclesiastical courts; but what can these avail us, so long as the law of patronage retains its vigour? While this is the case, our parishes must either continue vacant for ever, or the persons must be admitted that are present-

* Although inquiry was made, both by the author and his friends, whether any thing had been published upon the same plan with this; yet nothing could be found, except a small pamphlet, entitled, "An Elder's Expostulation with his Brethren," which appeared when this performance was nearly finished. It is written with a considerable degree of spirit, and seems, in general, to proceed upon the principles which are here explained: the only fault of it is, that it is too concise; for the scheme is not sufficiently laid open, that the people, to whom it is addressed, may see it with their own eyes.

ed to them. What then is the consequence of all the opposition and resistance that the church can make? It is either to leave the people destitute of the ordinances of religion, by refusing to settle ministers among them; or else to fill them with such invincible aversion from their ministers, that all their labours, to reconcile them, will be utterly ineffectual. These, and such as these, it will be said, are the blessed fruits which you shall reap from this reforming project.

Indeed, it must be granted, that if the church be really reduced to this abject condition by the law of patronage, all that hath been said is to very little purpose. But you must beware of being dispirited by any mere assertions upon this point. Do you not know, that it is an easy matter to make a general flourish upon any subject, and to muster up objections of the most formidable appearance, which, when carefully examined, are found only to be men of straw? However, as the total debility of the church, by this iniquitous law, has been so often and boldly asserted, that it seems to have gained considerable credit; and as, so far as it is believed, it must render this, or any scheme that can be proposed, altogether insignificant and useless, it is necessary, to be at some pains, to convince you, that it is absolutely a mistake. And that I may do this with the greater clearness and evidence, you will bear with me, while I endeavour:

I. To give you a short view of the several limitations and restraints under which the law of patronage actually stands. And then,

II. To show that it is the easiest thing in the world for the church, not only to shelter herself, from its severity, but even to divest it of all its force.

It is an incontestable fact, that the abolishing of

patronage was one of the first things which employed the attention of this church after the Reformation. For this purpose, application was made to the state, even before the Presbyterian government was legally established, in consequence of which, though patronage was not wholly abrogated, yet it was reduced almost to an empty form: for, in the year 1567, the church received power to reject any candidate whom a patron might present, whenever she found it not expedient to settle him. This is so clearly the meaning of that statute, that it hath extorted the testimony of some of our keenest enemies in its behalf; and, indeed, there is no avoiding it, as it makes the whole issue of the cause to turn merely upon the decision of the church-courts; for it is thus expressed in our ancient Scottish phrase: “Quhilk gif they (meaning the inferior courts) refuse, it fall be lesum, (*i. e.* lawful) to the patron to appeal to the general assembly of this haill realm, be quhame the cause beand decyded, fall tak end as they descerne and declair.” Which words, to every one that understands the language, are evidently incapable of any other interpretation.

This statute is again expressly declared to be ratified and confirmed by another which was made in the year 1581.

But, in the year 1592, the Presbyterian form of government was established by law, and the statute, which was enacted for that purpose, strongly ratifies all the former privileges and immunities of the church, and particularly the act by which her power of rejecting presentees was especially confirmed. This is the more necessary to be attended to, as it shows us how unfair it is to graft the contrary doctrine upon the following clause, which is subjoined to it:—“Providing the fore-saids presbyteries be bound and astricted to receive and admitt quhar-somever qualified minister presented be his majesty or laick patrones.” This is a clause of which

the advocates for patronage perpetually avail themselves, as if the church were hereby deprived of the discretionary power that was formerly given her. But I will take the liberty to say, that no person who ever read the statute can seriously believe, that this is the meaning of it, because the act, by which she received that power, is there confirmed as strongly as words can do it: for, (speaking of this, and other acts regarding the liberties of the church) it is said, " Qhilk sall be als sufficient, as gif the samin were here expressed." It is likewise manifest, that this clause can have no such meaning; from many other considerations:—from the total silence of our whole ecclesiastical history and records concerning it; for, if it had been understood in this sense, it is not to be supposed but it would have been loudly complained of, as an intolerable grievance;—from the many regulations which the assembly made for rejecting presentees a short while after.—And, from the uniform practice of the church, in exercising that power till the year 1612, when she was legally deprived of it. But, as if it were intended to put the matter beyond all possible doubt, there is an act relating to the disposal of the vacant stipend, when a presbytery refused to settle the presentee, which can have no meaning at all, if the church is not possessed of this discretionary power. For it provides, " That, in case the presbytery refuses to admit any qualified minister presented by the patron, it sall be laughfull to the patron to reteine the hail fruits of the benefice in his awin hands;" that is to say, only during the time that the cause is depending before the church-courts; for we have the most incontestible evidence from fact, which is the surest interpreter of all laws, that it cannot be understood as giving the patron a right to insist upon the admission of his presentee, under pain of withholding the benefice altogether; because the church was in use, during that whole period, to refuse admission merely upon

reasons of expediency; and yet there is not a single instance of any such inconvenience arising from it*. Those who know our history, will easily perceive, that it was the sole intention of the astringing clause in the act 1592, to prevent presbyteries from electing ministers to parishes themselves; a privilege which they had often claimed; and, therefore, requiring them to receive those candidates who were presented by patrons, in opposition to any of their own.

I have been the longer in explaining this statute, because it is the very foundation of our legal establishment, which was revived at the Revolution, and most solemnly confirmed at the Union; and, therefore, every privilege which it contains is transmitted down in safety to the present time. The only exception which was made at the Revolution, was concerning the persons in whom the right of patronage should be vested, which, as it was a matter of great importance, was reserved to after-consideration; and, in the year 1690, it was conferred on the heritors and elders of every parish. But here, according to the true spirit of the original statute, the church's power of admitting or rejecting candidates, was still preserved entire; only with this difference, which I reckon to be a great amendment, that the presbytery and the people together had an absolute negative upon the electors. And though, in the year 1712, the ancient patrons were again restored to their rights; yet, strange as it may seem, even here, strictly speaking, there was no encroachment made upon the prerogative of the church; for presbyteries were only required to "admit qualified persons, in the same manner as these ought to have been admitted before the making of that act."

* The reader may see this more fully explained in the Candid Inquiry, formerly referred to; a book, which, for the light it throws upon the constitution of this church, ought carefully to be perused both by ministers and elders.

Nothing therefore can be more certain, than that the church has a legal power of rejecting any presentee in the case of a reluctant people. This is a privilege which hath been secured to her by the most solemn and unalterable statutes of this realm; and it is sufficient for enabling her to prevent all violent settlements; because, when a presentee is once rejected, the patron has no remedy, but must either present another within the limited time, or his right will fall to the presbytery of the bounds. The only inconvenience that could arise from it, is, the prolonging of vacancies to an immoderate length; but the danger here is not so great as some may be ready to imagine, because patrons can reap no advantage from keeping parishes out of ministers; for they have not a right to the vacant stipend now, as they had formerly, but are obliged to distribute it for pious uses.

This, indeed, is the chief restraint which the law hath imposed upon the power of patrons; and, therefore, I shall but shortly mention the other circumstances by which it is still further limited, as being of less importance. These are,—that a presentation cannot be given by a nonjurant patron, otherwise he forfeits his right into the hands of the crown;—that every presentation must be formally lodged with the presbytery of the bounds within six months after the vacancy commenced;—that it must be accepted by the presentee, and the acceptance likewise lodged with the presbytery within the same time, otherwise the right is forfeited into the hands of the presbytery;—and that the presentee himself must be qualified to accept of it, by having previously taken the oaths to the civil government.

These limitations are a very salutary provision against long vacancies in parishes through the delays of patrons, and against disloyal ministers being settled among us; but they are of very little consequence in any other respect, although it was certainly the inten-

tion of the church, in applying for this act concerning acceptance, to take the sting out of patronage altogether; for it was not believed, at that time, that any probationer of our communion would dare to make good his claim, by fulfilling this odious condition; and, accordingly, Mr C—— of Kirk-Oswald, the first person in Scotland who accepted a presentation, had almost been deprived of his license, on that account.

But there is another limitation of the power of patrons of greater importance than these which have now been mentioned; and that is, that a presentation given to a minister, who is already the pastor of another parish, or even to a probationer who hath accepted of a presentation, upon which he may be settled in another parish, is utterly invalid. This is expressly declared in the act of Geo. I. 1719. For it is there provided, “That, if any patron shall present a person to any vacancy, who is then, or who shall be a pastor to any other church or parish, such presentation shall not be accounted any interruption of the time allowed to the patron for presenting.” It is unnecessary to spend time, in showing, that this is the true intent and meaning of this act; for the words are so plain and determinate, that I know of no other meaning that can be put upon them. The persons, here intended, are evidently ministers who are already settled, or probationers who are just about to be settled in other parishes. And, when it is declared, that a presentation given to these persons shall not be accounted any interruption of the six months, this must signify, that it shall not be considered as any legal presentation at all; for, whenever a valid presentation is given, and accepted, the course of time allowed to the patron is supposed to stop till once the cause be finally ended. The same thing might be further confirmed from the design with which this part of the act was made. This was certainly to prevent long vacancies in parishes; and, as it was

obvious, that, when a minister was beloved by his people, they would naturally be disposed, if possible, to retain him; and, as experience had shown, that, in these cases, parishes had often been kept long out of ministers, by the unwillingness of their own people to part with them, to the great hinderance of the progress of the gospel, it was judged the only effectual method to prevent this inconvenience, for the future, to declare ministers already settled incapable of being presented to any other charge.

This limitation of the power of patrons is of considerable importance; for, as it diminishes the number of objects upon whom it can be legally exercised, it is fitted to prevent much of the mischief arising from it. It is true, indeed, that the church hath hitherto neglected to lay hold of the advantage afforded her by this restricting law. Many ministers, as may well be supposed, were strongly against it, because it cut off all hopes of their own preferment. Others, again, were inclined to overlook it from a more generous motive, because, if ministers already settled could not be presented to other charges, it might often happen, that some of the finest talents should, in a great measure, be buried and lost. It is much to be lamented, that both friends and enemies should have agreed to neglect this law, which might have been improved to the most beneficial effects. There was a plain and easy method to prevent the consequences which they seem to have dreaded, by receiving the minister's demission, whom they had a mind to transport, before he accepted of a presentation; for it is only ministers having other charges whom it was intended to exclude. This would have kept the whole power of transportation in the hands of the church by a special security; so that no presentation could be given to any minister of a parish without her particular permission; and, besides, this power might likewise have been employed, as an engine, to influence

patrons to settle the vacant parishes agreeably to the people; without a regard to which circumstance, I do not see how it is possible to judge of the expediency of a transportation. Therefore the church, in all consistency with her own principles, should have laid hold of this law, and she ought to claim it still as of great advantage.

This now is the true state of the church with respect to the law of patronage. And is it not plain, beyond all contradiction, that she is under no necessity to carry on violent settlements, but has an absolute right to prevent them? But every possible objection from this quarter must be entirely removed, when we consider:

II. That it is the easiest thing in the world for the church, not only to shelter herself from the severity of the law of patronage, but even to divest it of all its force.

It has been shown, that the law itself hath excluded ministers already settled from accepting presentations to other charges; so that the church hath nothing to fear from patronage with respect to them. The only step she hath to take, is, to secure herself against probationers; and this she may do effectually, by making a general law for depriving them of their license, if they shall adhere to a presentation against the will of the people. If such a law as this were once enacted, and put in execution, all the grievances of patronage should quickly be at an end. A patron might present, indeed, but what could it signify? No person would presume to adhere to the presentation without the consent of the people; or, if he did, the presentation could have no shadow of force, because the presentee, being deprived of his license for his contemptuous disregard to the authority of the church, there would be no qualified person presented at all. In consequence of this, then, nothing is more evident, than that patrons would either

be obliged to present persons agreeable to the people, or else, after the six months were elapsed, (making allowance for any legal interruption of them,) the right would devolve unto the church, who might proceed to settle the vacant parishes with ministers of their own chusing.

Much will be said, no doubt, against such an alarming proposal as this. It will probably be represented, by many, as a direct and audacious opposition to the law of the land, as setting the church and state at variance with one another, and having a tendency to unhinge all the springs of government, by encouraging a spirit of licentiousness among the people. But, after all that can be said, this is a step which it is undoubtedly competent for the church to take; and I would fain know what reason there is for making such a hideous clamour against it? Surely, it cannot be denied, that patronage is a hard and oppressive law, that it infringes the most sacred rights of mankind, and hath been the cause of manifold mischiefs unto this church and country. Therefore it is a dictate of common reason and equity, that every fair and honest method may be taken to render it ineffectual; for such laws are only of the nature of mere external force, which people must submit to, when they are unable to resist them, but which no authority under heaven can make properly binding. But, besides, it is an unconstitutional law, being a direct violation of a solemn treaty, by which our privileges, both civil and sacred, were unalterably secured. Where then could be the harm, if the church should openly assert her privileges, in opposition to it? This would be doing nothing, but what the very spirit and genius of our government would support; and yet, all that is here proposed, is only to lay a restriction upon her own members, in order to evade its rigorous exercise.

But, though it should be granted, that the church

hath a right to impose this restriction, perhaps, it may be judged not expedient to use it, lest the state should fall upon some other method, to render our condition still more deplorable. Sorry should I be, if we ever had the smallest ground, for entertaining a suspicion of this kind. Must we, indeed, submit to any encroachment that may be made upon our privileges; lest we should be altogether bereaved of them? Then, farewell to that liberty which we so much boast of; for this conveys the most perfect idea of despotic government that can well be conceived. But, were we to suppose an intention in our government, to enforce the law of patronage, notwithstanding the measure we are now speaking of, I should be utterly at a loss, to comprehend, how it could accomplish this design; for, it is a most certain truth, that the church has not only the sole right both of ordaining and depriving ministers, but that her sentence is not cognoscible by any other court upon earth; and, therefore, when a person is once deprived by her, it is contrary to all sense and reason, to suppose that he can ever be presented to a parish so long as he continues under that sentence. However, if any should think it probable, that, rather than suffer the church to reap advantage from this measure, the state would turn the charges belonging to her into mere sinecures, by giving the benefices to those who have no clerical character at all; or that, in order to avoid this apparent absurdity, ministers might be ordained by the parliament, or, perhaps, by the court of session, (for these seem to be the only methods it could take to disappoint her,) I must leave such persons quietly to enjoy their own opinion; for it is not to be expected, that any thing that can be said will be sufficient to convince them of their mistake.

But, to refrain from every degree of ridicule upon so grave a subject, I would seriously ask, what motive our government could have, to enforce the law of pa-

tronage, in opposition to this measure. It is plain, that nothing less than violence itself could effect it. And is it to be thought, that the legislature would hazard the peace and safety of a whole country, to support a right which is shameful in its nature, oppressive in its tendency, and can be of no benefit to the person to whom it belongs? What advantage would arise from this to the government? Is this a right which tends to promote either our temporal or spiritual interests? Does it bring any money into the publick treasury? Is it fitted to advance the trade and commerce of the kingdom, or to make more sober, industrious, and loyal subjects? None of these things will be pretended. And, as I have already observed, even the interest of those who are possessed of it, cannot be pleaded in its behalf; for it is only a trust which the law hath committed to them, to be used for the publick good, without the smallest gratification or benefit to themselves.

I have nothing to do with any of those abominable arts, by which patrons may turn it to their own private advantage. Neither do I concern myself with any tacit contracts that may be made between parliament-men and voters, for procuring presentations to any of their friends. These are things, which, however common they may be among us, yet a person dares hardly take the liberty to assert them; for, being transacted in secret, like all the other works of darkness, it is, for the most part, impossible to bring the proof. It is enough, that every thing of this kind is absolutely unlawful. Nevertheless, it seems such practices are, at length, grown so open as well as common, that a late writer makes no scruple to speak them out. "It is now, says he, no rare thing to find pulpits filled with men who have purchased a recommendam unto their benefices, by good deeds done, or to be done by them, or their friends, unto the patron, or his friends. How often has a good word spoken in my lord's ear, in fa-

your of an hungry expectant, procured a vote for a member of parliament.*” And if this be really the case, can we believe that the government, without any shadow of reason, would attempt to defeat this measure, by enforcing a law, which hath not only introduced Simony and venality into the church, but hath enlarged the scene of corruption in the state itself? But I am loath to tire your patience with any needless confutation of such idle cavils; for the manifest truth is, that there is nothing to fear from the government, if the church were to make this regulation; and there is no other objection that can, with any appearance of plausibility, be brought against it.

I have now, brethren, finished what I intended upon this subject. I have both pointed out an easy and effectual method for delivering us from the hardships of the law of patronage, and endeavoured to remove every objection to which it is liable. What remaineth then, but that you should instantly put it into execution. How glorious is the prize which you have before you! Liberty! Sacred Liberty, the richest of all earthly blessings! And need I use any arguments to persuade you to contend for it? It were easy to give you a most affecting description of our oppressed condition as a church of Christ, if it would excite you to vindicate the rights which belong unto us; but this would be doing little more than repeating what hath been said by almost every writer against patronage for a long while past; and, besides, I suppose many of you have felt it sufficiently in your own unhappy experience. We have a striking account from a person of distinguished character, of the deplorable state to which our church was

* See an Attempt to prove, that every species of patronage is foreign to the nature of the church, page 102 of the second edition.

reduced almost twenty years ago. "Parishes, says he, are now considered in no other view than such a particular track of land, and the people, whom the law calls the congregation, as so many trees upon it; for they must not pretend to either conscience or sentiments of their own, much less rights or privileges. To talk of any regard to them, provided by law, either civil or ecclesiastical, in giving them religious teachers, is a mutinous evil spirit, which must be suppressed by all possible means. Such of the people as will not submit to those who are imposed on them for ministers, are threatened with excommunication. Ministers, who dare not sacrifice the laws of Christ, and the constitutional rules of the church, to the arbitrary orders of men, are deposed, or otherwise censured; and what is the consequence? these ministers preach on, and the people make themselves easy, by joining them; a schism is founded in the church, that none can see the end of, and the people are driven in shoals to erect new separate congregations.*" Such is the unhappy condition in which we have been lying for so long a period; and, alas! our grievances have ever since been on the increasing hand. Instances of uncomfortable settlements are multiplying every day; the sacred rights of Christians are trampled under foot by those very persons who ought to defend them; and the great purposes of edification, are, in many cases, entirely neglected. In consequence of this, what dreadful corruption, both in principle and practice, hath ensued! The people in many parishes are left in the grossest ignorance of the truths of the gospel; in all the great towns, infidelity, and every species of wickedness, rears up its head; and even the clergy themselves are not altogether free from the charge.

* See an Inquiry into the powers committed to the general assemblies of this church, written by the late Reverend Mr Adam of Falkirk.

A famine of the word of life, or of the great truths of the gospel, is the universal complaint of serious Christians in almost every corner of the land: nay, we have all been witnesses to the most publick and shameless denial of these truths by a minister of this church, and an open defence of the grossest equivocation, in making a solemn profession of them; and though, in the holy providence of God, who sometimes chuseth the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, a prosecution was raised against him by a person whom none would have thought of, and every attempt of this kind at last condemned by the synod of the bounds; yet, had it not been for the appearance which you made upon that occasion, there is no reason to believe it would have had any such issue.

But what shall we say of the enormities which break out from time to time in the sacred order? Let the annual prosecutions of this sort be an evidence of the melancholy fact. Drunkenness, fornication, adultery, sacrilege, all these have been charged upon ministers of the gospel! General levity and dissipation among clergymen, want of piety, and unconcern for the souls committed to their care, though fatal to the interests of true religion, are nothing when compared with these atrocious crimes. But I cannot think to enter on such a disgusting scene. I shall only mention a single instance, among many, to show what is the disposition of the ruling party in our church toward these offenders. —Not long ago the Reverend Mr William Nisbet, a minister in the north country, was prosecuted for adultery before the ecclesiastical courts; and, notwithstanding the clearest evidence against him, was likely to have escaped all church censure; unluckily, however, the court of Justiciary took up the trial, the jury unanimously found him guilty, and he was condemned to be banished to the plantations for life; then, indeed, but not till they were forced to it by this circumstance,

did his brethren pronounce the sentence of deposition against him.

After what hath been advanced, is it not too evident, that corruption of every kind is making the most formidable progress among us? How dismal is the condition to which we are now reduced! How threatening is its aspect upon posterity! Can we reasonably expect that these evils will not increase upon us, if matters be carried on as they are at present? And will nothing that can be said persuade you to bestir yourselves to prevent them? Now is the time for employing your utmost influence to save us from destruction; for, if you delay a while longer, it may be out of your power to do us any material service. Upon the present plan of settlements, not only the number of godly ministers must be gradually lessened, and in consequence of this a corrupt eldership will probably be introduced, by which the very means of our recovery will be cut off, but, besides, the pretended rights of patrons will be so established by practice, that it will be extremely difficult to overthrow them. And what will be the fatal issue of all? you may learn it from the spirited writer whom I formerly quoted: "The churches, being filled with an illiterate, worthless, and despicable ministry, our children shall be educated in the most gross ignorance of the Christian system, and shall learn from their ghostly guides, to hold religion in the greatest contempt, while they shall neither have spirit, capacity, nor inclination, to vindicate their liberty; and thus they shall inherit the curse of (spiritual) slavery, entailed upon them by the negligence of their fathers;" I may add, and be reduced to a state little better than heathenism itself.

But, if you would be persuaded strenuously to exert your influence in our behalf, all these threatening appearances would quickly vanish, and the most joyful prospect would open to our view. Then an effectual stop would be put to spiritual oppression; the rights of the

Christian people would be again restored; the church would be adorned with pious, holy, learned, and faithful pastors*, and every religious blessing be transmitted down in safety to succeeding generations.

You see then, that, next to the care of your own souls, nothing can be of greater concern to you than what I have now been proposing. Every thing that is sacred and valuable is at stake; the very means of salvation to yourselves, your friends, your countrymen, and even to posterity, seem to depend upon your conduct; and will not these considerations excite you to employ your utmost diligence, in order to secure such inestimable blessings? These are the blessings which our worthy ancestors have purchased for us, at the expence of their fortunes, their lives, and all that was dear to them in the world; and shall we, their descendants, carelessly allow them to be taken from us, and not be at the small expence of making a single effort to regain them? What an insult is this unto their

* Much hath been done to set the judgment of the people in these matters in the most ridiculous and contemptible light; they have not only been represented, as no judges of literary accomplishments, which they do not pretend to, but as having very mistaken notions of the qualifications of ministers in every respect. But nothing can be more false and injurious than this representation; for, if they have proper opportunities of being acquainted with them, it is amazing, to think, how soon they will discover any impropriety or defect about them. The only fault with which they are chargeable, is, that they are too ready to be caught with a first appearance. Here, indeed, I must confess, they are peculiarly liable to be deceived; and no wonder that they should; for how little can even the most accurate and penetrating observer know of the abilities or qualifications of a person from hearing him preach two or three sermons? and how much less can the generality of the people know of them from the same specimen? But were probationers to reside for some considerable time among them; were they to hear them often preach, and be witnesses to their behaviour on many different occasions, I believe, they would very seldom make a wrong choice.

sacred memory! What a reproach upon ourselves! What an unspeakable injury to posterity! But, above all, what contempt of God, and of his gospel! But I hope better things of you, brethren, than to behave in this manner. *Nevertheless, it is needful to write unto you, and exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.* Therefore be of good courage, and behave yourselves valiantly for your people, and for the city of your God. Remember, I beseech you, that the eyes of the whole nation will now be upon you, to see what you will do on this critical occasion. If you bravely undertake this noble enterprize, you will meet with the countenance, the protection, and the assistance of all the best and worthiest men. If you act your part well, you will gladden the hearts of thousands of your fellow Christians, and those that are yet unborn will resound your praise. But if you still continue in the same careless and inactive state, you will infallibly strengthen the hands of our enemies, and may be the means of wreathing the yoke of bondage for ever about our necks.

But I would chiefly have you to remember, that the eye of God himself is upon you, which ought to have an infinitely greater effect than the inspection of any mortal. This is no other than the cause of God which I am now pleading; and therefore he may be considered as waiting to see who will stand up for his interest. He is now calling you, in his holy providence, to one of the most important duties, that you can ever perform to him in this world; and how will you answer, at his tribunal, for the neglecting it? The circumstances which conspire to excite you to this duty, are the most affecting that can well be conceived; and, if you are still able to fold your hands in security, notwithstanding all these alarming dangers, there is reason to fear that God hath been provoked by our iniquities, to visit you with a spirit of slumber, from which

nothing will be able to awake you, and that he is now about to remove his candlestick out of its place. However, this will be no excuse for your neglecting so plain a duty; the guilt will rest upon your heads; and every call of this kind, which is addressed to your consciences, will rise up against you at the great day of accounts.

But let us not indulge these desponding thoughts. The church of Scotland, once the glory of the Reformation, hath hitherto had many unexpected and wonderful deliverances, both from secret and open enemies. Hence she hath chosen for an emblem, **THE BUSH BURNING, BUT NOT CONSUMED.** And should not this encourage us, to hope that the Lord *will yet arise, and have mercy upon us?* But if he shall be pleased to inspire you with an active concern for the interests of his kingdom, then may we expect, *that the time to favour us is at hand.* Let therefore all the true friends of religion unite their endeavours to hasten this blessed period; and, while we are obeying the calls of his providence, let us be fervent in our pleadings at the throne of grace, and *give him no rest till he make our Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

I JA 64

P O S T S C R I P T.

IN reflecting on what hath been said, page 41, concerning the dismal prospect which we have before us, upon the present plan of administration, it occurred that the force of the argument might be evaded, by taking refuge in some of the numerous sectaries that are among us. These I had no intention to have spoken of at all. But, since I am forced to do it, in justice to the subject, I would beg leave to observe, that the Established Church has not only distinguished advantages above all sectaries, for preserving the truths of the everlasting gospel; but that there is little probability of their being long continued with us after she hath rejected them. There is no arguing against experience. Never was there a religious society that had a more promising appearance, in this respect, than the dissenters in England, and yet now, a few instances excepted, there is hardly the smallest vestige of the doctrines of grace remaining among them. In like manner, the presbyterians in Ireland seem to be fast following their footsteps; for, by a publick contest which is carried on at present, there appears to be a prevailing party among them who are enemies to these doctrines. This is easily accounted for, both from the influence of the Established Church, upon the religious opinions of the nation, and from their being no articles of faith which dissenting ministers are legally obliged to teach. And I leave it with every person to judge, whether, if our church shall totally depart from these doctrines, there is not reason to expect, that a proportional degeneracy will take place even among the strictest of those

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who have separated from her? If this reasoning be just, it appears upon this, as well as many other accounts, to be the indispensable duty of all the members of our church, to try every possible expedient for reforming the corruptions that have crept in among us, before they set up in a separate interest. And, if the scheme that hath been proposed for this purpose were vigorously followed out, we should soon perceive a very remarkable change among our sectaries. Many serious Christians, who formerly belonged to the church, would again return to her communion, while the licentious and unbelieving might be supposed to withdraw.

THE END.

ERRATA.

Page 21. line 4. from the bottom, read, —and even necessity.—

Page 22. line 6. read, *grieving*.

Page 33. line 23. read, *would*.

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